

SOUTHERN VERNACULAR OPENS AT THE BLOCK GALLERY

"Southern Vernacular," sponsored by the Raleigh Arts Commission, will be on display April 2 through May 18 in the Miriam Preston Block Art Gallery at the Avery C. Upchurch Government Complex, 222 W. Hargett St. "Southern Vernacular" features the works of photographer Clifton Dowell, as well as multi-media pieces about North Carolina dialects presented by the North Carolina Language and Life Project of North Carolina State University. This is the second exhibition of the 2009 25th Anniversary Municipal Building Exhibition Series.

An opening-day reception for "Southern Vernacular" and in celebration of National Poetry Month honoring will be held on Thursday, April 2 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Block Gallery. The reception will honor Piedmont Poet Laureate Jaki Shelton Green, whose work will be featured in the second floor cases. The reception will also include *Front Porch Stories*, a collection of readings by local writers and artists, as they reflect on living in the South.

Clifton Dowell presents photographs from two series: *Short Track*, *Photographs from the Asphalt Oval* and *Depot District: A Commercial Neighborhood in Raleigh, NC*. Together, they present a varied picture of the vernacular of the South—those things, people, and places that feel essentially and inherently Southern, existing in a way that is particular to its location. The South, and specifically Wake County, is in a state of progress and transition, one which includes not only the young race car driver at the Wake County motor speedway, but also a hip downtown tattoo parlor, a gleaming new nightclub, and an old auto parts store.

Clifton Dowell became seriously interested in photography eight years ago when a box of black and white negatives from the 1940s was passed down to him. He is a former member of Antfarm Studios, an artists' collective in Raleigh. A journalist, he holds a B.A. in English from UNC-Chapel Hill and a certificate in documentary studies from Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies. His photography exhibits include: "Short Track: Photographs from the Asphalt Oval," Dec. '07-March '08, University Gallery, Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies; "artists from antfarm studios," April '08, group exhibit, Vintage 21, Raleigh, N.C.; "Our Streets: Documenting Our Evolving Landscape," 2003, Duke University; companion exhibit (group) to "Dream Street: W. Eugene Smith's Pittsburgh Photographs."

Complementing Dowell's photographs are mixed-media pieces created with the North Carolina Language and Life Project (NCLLP). Celebrating the sound of North Carolina, as our state is one of the most linguistically diverse in the United States, reflecting a wide variety of regional and socio-cultural English dialects as well as an assortment of ancestral and immigrant languages. Just as Dowell's photographs present a varied picture of the South, the NCLLP work (which culminates in documentary films) presents a wide and multi-faceted sound of the South—from the 'hoi toide brogue' of the Outer Banks to Southern Appalachian English. Established in 1993, the NCLLP focuses on research, graduate and undergraduate education, and outreach programs related to language in the American South. The program is lead by Walt Wolfram, William C. Friday Distinguished Professor of English at North Carolina State University. Videographer for NCLLP is Neal Hutcheson, whose production and directorial credits include *Mountain Talk* (2004), *Voices of North Carolina* (2005), and *Carolina Brogue* (2008), which debuts on UNC-TV on April 2.

Connecting local artists to community through ongoing exhibitions and public outreach, the Miriam Preston Block Art Gallery is located on the first and second floors of the Upchurch Government Complex. The gallery is managed by the City of Raleigh Arts Commission, and was dedicated in 2006 to honor Miriam Preston Block, a former Raleigh City Council member and community leader. The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. except on holidays.

Established in 1977 as the official advisory body and advocate for the arts to the Raleigh City Council, the City Raleigh Arts Commission proudly holds the distinction of being the first municipal arts commission created in North Carolina. Serving as the leading force to champion the arts with Raleigh citizens and their representatives, the Commission's myriad activities foster, support, and promote the arts in the Capital City.

For more information, contact the Arts Commission office at 996-3610 or email Sarah Blackmon, gallery coordinator, at sarah.blackmon@ci.raleigh.nc.us.

{NOTE TO MEDIA: Attached is the photography by Clifton Dowell, "Jessie Richardson Jr., Race Car Driver, Wake County Speedway, 2007}